

Introduction

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Introduction

Andrew Ginger and Geraldine Lawless

Over the past quarter of a century, the study of nineteenth-century Hispanic culture and society has undergone two major shifts. The first was a rejection of what the economic historian David Ringrose called ‘the myth of backwardness’: the notion that these cultures and societies were exceptions that trailed behind the wider West.¹ Replacing this myth, there has been a concerted effort to show how Hispanic cultures and societies were integral parts and inflections of the development of the modern world. The second trend – particularly prevalent in cultural and literary study – was a critical focus on a core triad of nation, gender, and representation. The interrelationship of these three was widely seen as defining the discursive and ideological structures of the hegemonic social systems of ‘modernity’. These two main tendencies in historiography combined in an understanding that the specific way that Hispanic cultures and societies were integral to the West was the manner in which they participated in the discursive and ideological structures of nation, gender, and representation through which modern social systems constructed themselves. Jo Labanyi’s great study, *Gender and Modernization in the Spanish Realist Novel* (2000) crystallized this trend.²

These breakthroughs were followed by a sustained expansion of what is studied, and by an equally sustained sophistication of method. There was an impulse to show how such societies related to broader patterns in the West, and this was accompanied by a voracious urge to address perspectives, approaches and theorizations that have proved fruitful in relation to these wider developments. There has been a rediscovered emphasis on imperialism, colonialism, slavery and race as key factors in society and conceptions of nationhood, both in Spain itself and in its

dependent territories of the period, especially Cuba and the Philippines.³ Within Iberia, the combination of nation, gender, and representation has provided a vehicle through which to understand the fraught dynamism of the relationships between Spain's several nationalities.⁴ National narratives on which interpretations of these nationalities rest have been queried, a stance encapsulated in the title of the influential collection of essays *Spain Beyond Spain* (2005).⁵ Concerns with gender and related medical-historical approaches have expanded to encompass, inter alia, same-sex relations, hermaphroditism, and so-called 'deviance'.⁶ Just as there has been a concern to re-connect nineteenth-century Spain to wider developments, so there has been a preoccupation with the ways in which cross-border and global relationships shaped Spanish culture and society. These range from personal and intellectual connections across the Spanish-speaking Atlantic (and beyond), to the translation and re-working of European novels, to new understandings of networks linking so-called peripheral parts of Europe.⁷ It has become clear that some key ways in which Spanish national culture was debated were in fact forged in overtly transnational contexts.⁸

On an empirical level, there has been a much more determined and positive focus on the study of literature, ideas, and culture of the period before the so-called Glorious Revolution (*La Gloriosa*) of 1868-74, so often previously taken to be a watershed in terms of quality of thought and artistry. There has been a renewed engagement with radical leftist thought as much as traditionalist visions;⁹ with startling experiments in literature and art in the first two thirds of the century from the writers Rosalía de Castro and Antonio Ros de Olano to the painter Eugenio Lucas;¹⁰ and with whole genres, whether that might be illustrations in magazines, the nude in art, or popular novels concerned with sex;¹¹ and broad cultural concerns such as the establishment of art collections.¹² Though much remains to be done in creating modern editions, numerous

important texts have been republished.¹³ In the world of the visual arts, there has been a re-housing of the nineteenth-century collections of the Prado within the extensions to the main building, as well as new catalogues and exhibitions.¹⁴

In re-situating nineteenth-century Spain within the wider West, historians of culture, politics, and society have begun to bring out some of the unique features of its inflection of wider developments. Some of these – like bullfighting, or the persistent significance of the Catholic Church and of religious concerns, or the lengthy dependence of this European power on slavery – were, so to speak, hidden in plain sight, but needed to be subject to less mystification and more understanding of the specifics of their historical role on the ground.¹⁵ Others – notably the distinctive aesthetic contributions of Spanish artists and writers mentioned above – required new levels of comparativist study in order to be more fully understood. Often, a shift of perspective has been necessary to bring distinctive factors more fully into view. The institution of monarchy proved both central to the destiny of the country's politics and profoundly compromised by a series of factors, from machinations and anti-Liberal sentiment at Court, to the accession of Isabel II as a child-queen in 1833.¹⁶ A precocious radicalization and politicization of great swathes of the population extending into rural areas occurred due not least to the persistent, related civil war and violence, which at the same time gave power to military leaders within both the Liberal and Absolutist camps.¹⁷ If Spain was surprisingly radical in political terms, and (as of 1834) persistently parliamentary even as it was often praetorian in its dominant political forms, it was also characterized less by a failed attempt at creating a single national identity, than by a plural, energized dynamic of rival conceptions of nationality.¹⁸ At the same time, exile, and thus life in other societies and cultures, became a defining experience for many Spanish intellectuals and writers for much of the century as they fled or were expelled from the country's internal

turbulence, often returning at a later date as their individual circumstances changed with the changing times.¹⁹ Meanwhile, the legacy of Islamic and Jewish Spain, and of the transoceanic early-modern Spanish monarchy complicated Spaniards' relationship to the Orient (compared, say, to that of the French or the British) and meant that ethnic exclusion and inclusion was often framed in terms of a special racial heterogeneity.²⁰

The focus of this book

The notion of Spain's relative 'normality' within the West has thus become less a point of contention and novel conclusion and more the starting-point of investigations. And, as research expands, so the growing richness of our understanding of nineteenth-century Spain is stretching beyond the limits of the nation-gender-representation triad. It is becoming important to bring other subjects more directly into view, without losing sight of those established objects of study.

The same may be said of methods of research. At times, the nation-gender-representation triad has rested on very specific accounts of ideology, in which the latter is envisaged as the offshoots of a social system that rests on a foundational principle or principles. This has often led to a focus on ideological drives, or, conversely, on resistance to such forces. And, because of the premise that the perpetrators or the victims were unaware of what was driving them or lacked the necessary analytical tools, decisions about what to study risk being directed away from what these people themselves saw as important or significant. There have been some significant countervailing accounts to that trend. Sedgwick has commented on the risk inherent in US critical theory, that 'where Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud by themselves are taken as constituting a pretty sufficient genealogy for the mainstream of New Historicist, deconstructive, feminist, queer, and psychoanalytic criticism, to apply a hermeneutics of suspicion is [...] widely

understood as a mandatory injunction rather than a possibility among other possibilities'.²¹ With more specific reference to Spain, and apropos of cultural studies, Noël Valis in *The Culture of Cursilería* (2002) explains:

In some versions [...] a largely uncontested tenet presumes that historical realities can be invariably organized into monolithic blocks of dominant and marginal groups. The 'dominant elite' appears motivated purely by power and the desire to exclude the marginal, while the marginal seems uniquely characterized as the non-dominant, that is, as an essential (and often essentialized) lack, whose virtue derives from its nondominance. The result is a reductive impoverishment of our critical and historical understanding.²²

Valis grapples with the relationship between long-term developments and (temporal and geographical) local specificities, and also with those grand narratives that tend to tidy away the leftovers and loose ends of lived experience:

Either we explain these pieces of varying size as part of the whole, in functionalist terms, so that everything fits the picture and coheres, narratively and otherwise, or, contrary to this organicist model that narrative tends to favor, we declare the existence of contradiction, disjunction, and randomness. One recognizes ruptures within the presumed uniformity and homogenous strength of a culture and the role human agency plays in catalyzing the process of rupture.²³

In considering Romanticism and its legacy, Valis comes to prize an emphasis on what she calls ‘cultural practice’.²⁴ Within the revived field of biographical study, there has been a related attempt to understand the degree of agency that individuals exert, how they did so, and with what limitations, an approach best exemplified in this field by Isabel Burdiel’s account of Queen Isabel II.²⁵ There is a similar awareness that individuals may be driven, and their lives framed by, concerns other than those of nationality per se, as Fernando Durán has observed of the religious and critically minded José María Blanco White, a leading Spanish exile in Britain.²⁶

This collection of essays provides a strong focus for the exploration and stimulation of substantial new areas of enquiry. The shared concern is with how members of the cultural and intellectual elite in the nineteenth century conceived or undertook major activities that shaped their lives. In that spirit, each chapter title begins with the words ‘How to...’ and the volume looks at how nineteenth-century Spaniards went about specific tasks. The essays are not confined to any single area of practice, nor do they share a home in social history, biography, or literary criticism, though all these things are here. These essays share three things in varying degrees. First, there is an appreciation of the fact that plurality, contradictions and/or inconsistencies are an inevitable part of lived experience. Second, there is a willingness to let this be. And third, there is a reluctance to rationalize in terms of a conspiracy to oppress. The volume looks at how people did things without necessarily framing questions of motive or incentive in terms that would bring the debate back to a master system of gender, racial, ethnographic or national proportions.

We thereby incorporate, but also break the limitations of, the nation-gender-representation paradigm by inviting researchers to range more freely in identifying what mattered to people in nineteenth-century cultures and societies. It is an inevitable reality of this

kind of productive, open invitation, that the series of topics studied could be extended to the study of activities other than those we consider here, to a succession of further *how tos*... In one sense, that is the point: our objective is to broaden further still the scope of scholarship, and not to reduce matters to a closed system. At the same time, within this collection of essays, we present a major series of understudied and fundamentally important topics in nineteenth-century Hispanic Studies. The collection opens with a gaze upon nineteenth-century Spain from the distance of long-term history. From there, we move into the nineteenth century to survey a series of overarching challenges with which the cultural and intellectual elite wrestled, from how to be universal to how to right wrongs. Then we zoom into roles played by particular groups of people (literary figures, intellectuals, men), before finally focusing our eyes upon one individual life.

Our concern is with cultural practices and with ways of living within a culture and society. We do not exclude the use of the term *cultural practices* as referring to the sociological and ideological manifestations of a social system, as may have been habitual in Hispanic cultural studies under the influence of Bourdieu, for example.²⁷ However, we emphasize how people's ways of conceiving their lives and their corresponding practices, in and of themselves, are fundamental to giving shape to cultures and societies, rather than being expressions of social systems. We are attentive here to something like what Richard Sennett has recently called 'the craft of experience', the 'techniques' that enable people to make their way through life and to participate.²⁸ We are not concerned here, however, with presenting an ethical ideal. Adaptability, paradox, and/or logical inconsistency, in varying combinations and emphases come to the fore in many of the essays, not so much because they reveal contradictions in a socio-economic system, as because they are expressions of a human quest for opportunity and survival in a complex and changing world. The nineteenth-century Hispanic world had been shattered to its core by wars,

civil wars, and revolutions, at the same time as it confronted a new period of European and North-American expansion and development across numerous spheres of life, from the military to international publishing to industry. We explore here some of the major, dynamic ways in which people sought to adapt and change, or even simply to continue as they were.

Context in these essays means much more than that certain conditions predominated in a given year or decade or even century, or in a particular place. The term is understood here in a much more rich and variegated way. At times, the word *context* itself - suggestive as it is of a delineated location in time and place with boundaries about it - is more an obstacle than an aid to comprehension, however much it may be qualified or rendered complex. A patchwork of long-term factors and legacies were crucial and persistent in nineteenth-century Spain. So too – and together – were the wider effects of having governed a global empire over centuries, and a burning desire to integrate Spain and its territories into developments that were shaping the wider world. We begin with the long view of state formation out of which nineteenth-century Spain emerged. The state was struggling still with challenges and attempted solutions first confronted in the medieval and early-modern period. It was as much an orphan of its own system of governance over an area stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific as were its former domains in the Americas (and vice-versa). In this sense, the crises of nineteenth-century Spain were the crises of many centuries and of a vast region of the globe.

Throughout the collection we see how long-term cultural and societal trends, stemming from the medieval and early modern periods, remained significant reference points. This is particularly true of the Catholic Church, and, more broadly of loyalty to Catholic and Christian belief. It is the case too with notions of chivalry, honour, and valour, with long-standing social roles such as that of the *man of letters* (which appears to outweigh the feminine equivalent,

mujer de letras, by over a thousand to one in usage in the nineteenth-century Spanish press),²⁹ and with traditions concerning the genders from bearded men to so-called masculine women (*mujeres varoniles*). This is not to say that nothing new was afoot. Manifestly, the collapse of the historic system of monarchy was unprecedented, as was Spain's eclipse by the Great Powers - even by the standards of the previous century. There was an influx from Europe and beyond of innovative ideas, practices, and simply - but just as importantly - fashions and forms of gentility. Over time these included the widespread, explicit circulation of notions hostile to the Faith. Equally, the older practices and ideas constituted something more, or other than a homogeneous body of traditional doctrine, with definitive dogmatic answers to the problems of humanity and of Spain, and with a common single origin. Much of the longer legacy was one of an ongoing struggle with recurrent problems and objectives, and between contested visions of the Crown or State and Church, as well as of the various component parts of what was called Spain, among many other choices or dilemmas. The legacy of the past was as often as not a ragbag of notions, accumulated over centuries, that was applied or revoked, accepted or rejected, diversely and by turns, as it always had been. The same may be said of the 'new ideas' themselves. Neither the 'old' nor the 'new' need be thought of as categories embodying either philosophical coherence or stemming from a single point in place and time.

Many members of Spain's cultural and intellectual elite were alert to, or at the very least vividly expressed such challenges facing any clear notion of locatedness in a specific place or time. Often, their practices are implicitly suggestive of other ways of imagining the world than those enshrined in the word *context*, or, at a minimum, reveal the multiplicity and variety of relevant things that might simultaneously be thought to constitute *the context*. For example, the historic notion of the man of letters segues into that of the intellectual, and this can be understood

in terms of interdependent technological, political, and literary change. Ideas and practices travelled backward and forward across multiple borders and played out on different types of public stage as and when opportunities presented themselves. Not least through the prestige of women authors, literary networks directly joined Spain to other ‘peripheral’ cultures, as well as supposedly dominant centres like Paris. Some Spanish subjects both in and beyond Spain, openly advocated an altogether different conceptualization of place and time, not merely transnational or transhistorical, but unbounded by narrow notions of locatedness. Writers and artists might, for example, at one and the same time employ a view of history both as cyclical and as continual progress towards a future, slipping between contrasting or complementary visions. Others explicitly sought out ways in which the specificities of a particular location could be bound to all humanity across the centuries. They explored how things of the past or of other places are living realities beyond the confines of any supposed contextualization. In many cases, Spaniards juggled, wrestled with, or just made use of diverse value systems and terms of reference with quite distinct origins. Variegated sets of terminology overlapped in what Spaniards had to say, and in how they conceived their social roles. The trajectory of the artist Pablo Picasso is an exemplary instance of such phenomena. At the turn of the century, and - we might imagine - on course to be foundational for ‘modernism’, Picasso’s work is fraught with pressures emanating from diverse views of life with conflicting provenances. Not least among these, once more, is that ancient institution: the Catholic Church. Arguably, twentieth-century Spanish culture was born less of an embrace of the new per se, than of the multifaceted experiences of place and time bequeathed to it by the nineteenth; and the nineteenth, in turn, took these experiences from across the ages. The *siglo diecinueve* was much more than of its own time.

Such nineteenth-century ways of doing things are suggestive of a further set of *how tos*

with which this collection of essays - like this introductory chapter - deals. Collectively, these might be titled: *how to write about nineteenth-century Spain*. There are three ways in which the various chapters address that concern; on some occasions, a chapter deals primarily with one of these, on others with a combination of them. The first is to write about the nineteenth century in a fashion that gives breathing space to the multifaceted nature of lived experience and practices, the coexistence of diverse conceptions of time, place, and value. Here, style and tone are substance. The second is to set out explicitly a possible way of writing about the nineteenth century. In some instances, this takes the form of a specific overarching approach, such as life-writing, or the tracing of transnational networks of cultural transmission. In others, it takes shape as a series of emergent questions that researchers might ask themselves, for example about how to explore journalistic texts. The third is to find, in nineteenth-century Spanish culture, practices with which we might experiment when writing now: simultaneous expression of multiple temporalities, for example, or a poetics free of contextualization.

Ways of being in nineteenth-century Spain are thus living sources for historians far beyond Iberia and well after the year 1900.

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